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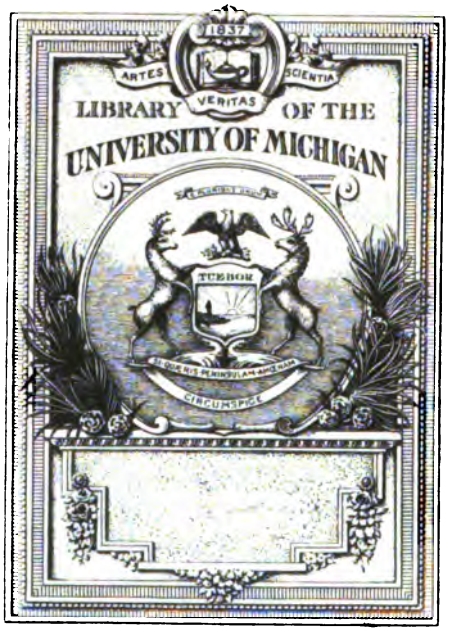
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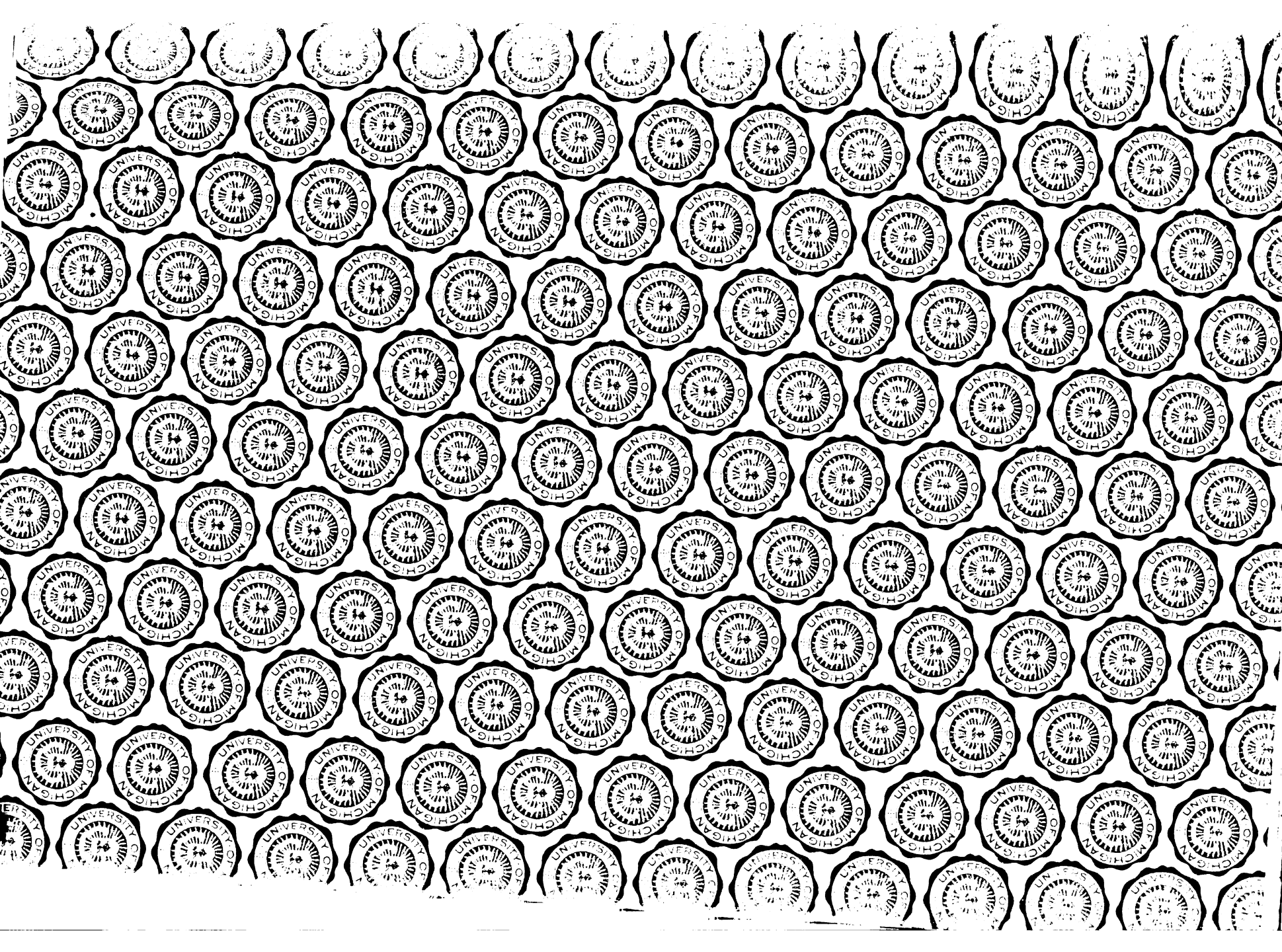
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9

BEAUTY,

A

POETICAL ESSAY.

In THREE PARTS.

828
P995b

Rt. Hon. Henry James 1745-1813

LONDON,
Printed for T. BECKET and P. A. DE HONDT in the Strand.
MDCCLXVI.
[Price One Shilling.]

828
P9956

English
Pickering
2-18-27
1441.4

BEAUTY,

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PART I.

THE various powers by NATURE's hand combin'd
To fill with harmony the raptur'd mind;
Whoſe forms, as diff'rent luſtre they impart,
Or ſtrike the ſenſes, or exalt the heart,
My daring MUSE unfolds;—reſolv'd to trace
The glorious theme thro' ev'ry path of ſpace;
Till borne aloft on Truth's triumphant wings
Boldly ſhe riſe, and ſoaring as ſhe ſings,
By Fancy urg'd, ſhe ſhape her vent'rous flight
To thoſe bleſt regions of ſupreme delight,
Where BEAUTY pours her nobleſt, brighteſt ray,
Amidſt the manſions of eternal day.

DAUGHTERS of ALBION; ye whoſe eyes diſpenſe
The mildeſt beams of virgin innocence,
Whoſe charms by all the Graces are deſign'd,
Each the fair emblem of a fairer mind,
To you I dedicate this votive lay:—
With kind applauſe the pleaſing labour pay:
Crown with your myrtle wreaths my artleſs lyre,
Nor ſcorn the numbers which yourſelves inſpire:
So ſhall my MUSE the Poet's bay diſclaim,
And prize your ſmiles, beyond the breath of Fame.

Come, ſacred NATURE! Nymph divinely bright!
Unfold thy proſpects to my eager ſight,
O'er flow'ry lawns, with thee, O, let me rove,
And tread the devious lab'rinth of the grove.
Come in the garb of ſimple grandeur dreſs'd,
And by thy precepts form my docile breaſt;
Clear ev'ry miſt, and give my eyes to ſee,
That BEAUTY only is deriv'd from thee.
Teach me that ev'ry art in ev'ry age
Is but a tranſcript from thy perfect page,

Where

Where imitation ever charms us moſt,
And the beſt model, is the nobleſt boaſt.
When the diſcerning ſons of Greece and Rome
Bent the proud arch, and ſwell'd the ſtately dome,
E'er gothic ſtructures idly pleas'd the heart,
With all the nice perplexities of art,
The glorious architects rever'd thy name,
And following NATURE, found the road to fame.
While Gallic artiſts proud to ſhine alone
Amidſt a new creation of their own,
Boaſt too refin'd a taſte to ſuffer thee
To guide a riv'let, or to rear a tree;
But art, expence, and labour have combin'd,
To draw th' attention of the trifling mind,
That ſenſeleſs crowds may view with ideot ſtare,
The watry column, and the ſpruce parterre.
Yet tho' LE NOTRE bade on ev'ry ſide
The dazzling garden ſpread its flow'ry pride,
While the unvaried lawn, and viſta'd ſhade,
In lines, and ſquares were regularly laid;

Tho' proud VERSAILLES, thro' marble fountains, play
Her tortur'd waters to the face of day,
Such ſcenes, which only charm us by ſurprize,
O! may I never view, but to deſpiſe:
My wand'ring footſteps rather deign to lead
Thro' the dark foreſt, or th' enamel'd mead;
Where winding ſtreams divide the verdant vale,
And artleſs muſic floats in ev'ry gale.

Ye NYMPHS of PINDUS! who have ſtill poſſeſs'd
From earlieſt infancy my raptur'd breaſt,
And thou, celeſtial FANCY, matchleſs maid!
Deſcend propitious to your vot'ry's aid,
Bear me to happier regions far away,
From whence HYPERION darts his ev'ning ray,
Where BEAUTY's native form was ne'er defac'd
By ſervile ignorance, and barb'rous taſte,
But thro' luxuriant fields, and fragrant groves,
In innocence the peaceful ſavage roves:

Where

Where lofty mountains lift their piny heads,
Where its green lap the vaſt ſavannah ſpreads,
Or where the congregated waters ſweep
With foaming lapſe, down NIAGARA's ſteep,
Can all the pride of taſteleſs artiſts vie
With objects vaſt as theſe! — in Reaſon's eye?
Where BEAUTY dwells amidſt the ſpacious plains,
Dreſs'd in her richeſt pomp, for NATURE reigns.

But ſay, to ſcenes of humbler grace unknown,
Dwells BEAUTY with magnificence alone?
And from BRITANNIA's pleaſing proſpects hurl'd,
Deigns ſhe alone to bleſs the weſtern world?
Not ſo, — her lovely form is here diſplay'd
In ev'ry leaf that forms the ſummer ſhade,
And ev'ry blooming flower, that paints the vernal glade.

Who ſtretch'd upon the green hill's breezy brow
Can ſee the various landſcape ſpread below,

The

The village ſpire — the wreathing ſmoke aſcend,
The foreſt wave, the thymy downs extend,
The ſhining river roll its ſilver ſtream
Thro' woods, impervious to the ſolar beam,
Or 'midſt the meads in ſmooth mæanders glide,
While bending oziers ſtoop to kiſs the tide,
Till in th' horizon faintly ting'd with blue,
The diſtant mountains cloſe the pleaſing view,
And not in ev'ry tint of NATURE's hand,
See BEAUTY's form, and own her mild command?

When from the Eaſt the glorious orb of day
Pours on the burniſh'd cliff a golden ray,
While pearly dew-drops, ſprinkled by the morn,
Shine in the turf, or glitter on the thorn;
When ſplendid in meridian light array'd,
His piercing beams the woodland gloom pervade,
When wrap'd in miſty ev'ning's ſilent reign,
Th' encreaſing darkneſs ſteals acroſs the plain,

Or

Or when in virgin ſtate, the Delian Queen
Drives her bright chariot thro' the blue ſerene,
While ſcatter'd round in fair confuſion lie
The inferior glories of the vaulted ſky:
When gently o'er the flower-empurpled vale,
The vernal zephyrs breathe a genial gale;
When as fierce ſummers ſultry rays deſcend,
With bluſhing fruit the loaded branches bend,
When autumn crowns the hills with waving corn,
And pours profuſion from his twiſted horn,
While deep'ning ſhade on ſhade, the woods are ſeen
From the full crimſon, to the faded green:
Or when the trees their leafy honours yield,
And chearleſs ruſſet clads the dreary field;
When the caſcade by wintry fetters tied,
Muſt ceaſe to murmur, and the ſtream to glide;
While blows the ſtorm, or falls the delug'd rain,
Or fleecy ſnows o'erſpread the whiten'd plain,
And NATURE, tho' her meaneſt garb ſhe wears,
Majeſtic ev'n in miſery appears.

In

In ev'ry ſeaſon, ev'ry hour, I trace
Imperial BEAUTY! thy tranſcendent grace;
Behold each ſcene thy lovely form diſplay,
And wond'ring, own thy univerſal ſway.

Bleſt is the youth! on whoſe high-favour'd head
The ſacred Nine their happy influence ſhed;
Inſpir'd by them, his raptur'd eyes explore
The choiceſt objects of thy charming ſtore.
For him their ſtrains the ſylvan warblers breathe,
For him fair MAIA twines her flow'ry wreath,
Fragrant for him the morning breezes blow,
The poplar trembles, and the fountains flow,
Each charm of Nature ſtrongly ſtrikes his breaſt,
And BEAUTY ſhines ſupreme, by young ey'd FANCY dreſs'd.

BEAUTY,

A POETICAL ESSAY.

PART II.

OF all that NATURE's rural proſpects yield,
The chryſtal fountain and the flow'ry field,
Enough, my MUSE! — the force of BEAUTY trace
Now in each feature of the female face,
For there ſhe boaſts ſuperior powers, that move
The melting ſoul to extaſy and love.
O! whiſper to my heart, AONIA's choir,
Harmonious numbers, and ſeraphic fire!
Reſiſtleſs Queen of PAPHOS, aid my ſtrain,
With all the Loves and Graces in thy train.
Ye ſportive Nymphs, and laughing Pleaſures join,
Adorn each thought, and poliſh ev'ry line.
With ſuch aſſiſtance ſhall my ſong rehearſe
The faireſt ſubject in the ſweeteſt verſe.

BRITANNIA! happy land! thy ſea-girt coaſt
The tend'reſt ornament of love can boaſt:
From other regions exil'd, here alone
Fair DELICACY rears her ſacred throne:
HONOR and MODESTY her lineage claim,
Her nurſe was DECENCY, her tutor FAME,
Deſire attends where'er her footſteps move,
Unalter'd bliſs, and never-fading love.
O! keep her rules for ever in your view,
Ye NYMPHS of ALBION, for I ſing to you:
Tho' your bright charms can kindle fiercer flames
Than thoſe of fam'd CIRCASSIA's lovely dames,
With ſtedfaſt courſe purſue her perfect plan,
Whoſe dictates pleaſe us more than BEAUTY can.
Let GALLIA's ſunburn'd maids their cheeks incruſt
With the falſe varniſh of a crimſon duſt;
On artificial locks, which tow'ring riſe
A monſtrous pile, and ſeem to threat the ſkies,
Let them, with taſte capricious, powder ſpread,
To ape the honours of a hoary head:

So

So CALEDONIA's fir-crown'd hills appear,
When big with ſnow deſcends th' inclement year:
Let them, each ſoft endearment laid apart,
With open impudence attack the heart:
Form'd as you are each Beauty to diſplay,
And mock the painter's tint, and poet's lay,
Ne'er may this modeſt ornament be loſt,
Your firſt perfection, and your faireſt boaſt,
Which can your eyes with force reſiſtleſs arm,
Point ev'ry glance, and double ev'ry charm.
Ne'er may your ſkill ſuch foreign arts employ,
To raiſe that paſſion which they muſt deſtroy:
Still let your ſkins, with native luſtre, ſhew
The white roſe, blended with its bluſhing foe;
Still let your hair, with unaffected grace,
In gloſſy ringlets decorate your face:
With powers like theſe can pomp and ſplendor vie,
The ſparkling di'mond, or the Tyrian dye?
When youth and beauty deck the blooming maid,
The purple ſickens, and the di'monds fade.

Adorn'd with charms that ev'ry art deſpiſe,
Victorious Love exults, and triumphs in her eyes.

Not all the bloſſoms NATURE's fingers fling
O'er the gay plains, when Zephyr breathes the ſpring,
Pleaſe like the Nymph, whoſe winning ſmiles inſpire
Love's gentle flame, and kindle warm deſire;
Pale is each flower, and faded ev'ry green,
If female BEAUTY heighten not the ſcene.
When newly form'd, and plac'd in EDEN's ſhade,
Our waking Sire the bluſhing fields ſurvey'd,
Awhile he view'd the land with fond delight,
Awhile the fair creation charm'd his ſight;
But ſoon the pleaſing novelty was o'er,
And ſoon the fair creation charm'd no more:
Heaven ſaw the dull ſtagnation of his breaſt,
And, pitying, ſent him EVE, to make him bleſt;
With her, diſtreſs he rather wiſh'd to ſhare,
To live by toil, and taſte the bread of care,

Than

Than with his careleſs limbs on roſes thrown,
To prove the joys of Paradiſe alone:
With her thro' dreary waſtes he choſe to go,
Friend to her grief, and partner of her woe:
Chear'd by the flame of love, the deſart ſmil'd,
And more than EDEN bloom'd upon the wild.

May the curs'd wretch! from female charms who roves
To monſtrous pleaſures, and unſeemly loves;
Who from kind NATURE's lucid fountain flies
To the polluted pools of guilty joys,
Far from the ſocial haunts of man be driv'n,
And left to conſcience, and avenging Heaven.
But hail! ye favour'd train! ſupremely bleſt
With the rich treaſure of a feeling breaſt,
Who fir'd by tranſports, exquiſitely fine,
Submiſſive kneel at BEAUTY's brighteſt ſhrine,
Whether the ſprightly virgin claim your care,
Or arm'd with majeſty, the haughtier fair,

Or

Or the ſweet nymph, whoſe melting eyes proclaim
Her boſom, form'd for Love's imperial flame,
Where as we gaze, the torch of young Deſire
Lights in our breaſts a ſympathetic fire:
Hail, happy train! form'd only to receive
The faireſt joys the hand of Heaven can give,
Joys, which alone th' exalted ſoul can prove,
The burning extaſies of mutual love.
Far from your paths be hate, and fell diſdain,
Pale jealouſy, and ſorrow's weeping train:
To crown your hours, may love with friendſhip join,
And ſmiling peace her roſeate garlands twine,
And every golden moment take its flight,
Wing'd with ſoft eaſe, and pregnant with delight,
Till time proclaims their deſtin'd period run,
And death concludes the bliſs which love begun.

Ye ſtoic tribe, who o'er the mind preſide
With uſeleſs ſway, and impotence of pride:

Who

Who form your empty rules, with childiſh art,
To force each gen'rous paſſion from the heart,
With eager zeal your air-built ſchemes purſue,
And talk of feelings which ye never knew:
So may the wretch of lights and colours dream,
Whoſe eye-balls never drank the ſolar beam;
LOVE ſhall ſuperior to your efforts riſe,
Elude your labours, and your toils deſpiſe:
LOVE, whoſe fierce rays in every climate ſhine,
The Arctic Circle, or the ſcorching Line:
Inſpir'd by LOVE, beneath the ſpicy ſhade,
The am'rous Indian wooes the ſable maid:
LOVE's ſacred power the frozen Zemblians know
'Midſt icy rocks, and mountains form'd of ſnow,
For there his glowing beam with genial light
Has pierc'd the gloom, and chear'd the polar night.
Where eaſtern luxury (thoſe joys unknown
Which ſpring from mutual liberty alone,)
Commits, relentleſs, to the Eunuch's care,
With barb'rous dignity, th' impriſon'd fair,

O'er

O'er the deſerted ſhores and barren plains,
Pale Tyranny in all her horrors reigns;
No dauntleſs Patriots there the Deſpot awe,
His will is reaſon, and his ſentence law:
While the mean ſlaves, a cruel, coward train,
Bow to the rod, and kiſs the galling chain:
But where, with gentle ſway, LOVE's friendly hand
Has ſtretch'd its influence o'er a happy land,
There in the ſhade of each inſpiring grove,
By ſcience led, the warbling Muſes rove;
There all the gen'rous paſſions fix their ſeat,
And ev'ry boſom burns with patriot heat,
There manly courage dwells, ingenuous ſhame,
And VIRTUE's conſcious worth, and FREEDOM's
glorious flame.

BEAUTY,

A POETICAL ESSAY.

PART III.

YE pleaſing viſions, and fantaſtic dreams,
Of hallow'd mountains, of poetic ſtreams,
And ſhades for ever ſacred to the ſong
Of Græcian Phœbus, and the Theſpian throng,
O! melt into the winds, nor longer ſpread
Your ſweet deluſions round my raptur'd head:
But thou, celeſtial TRUTH, my prayer attend,
And be my MUSE, my GUARDIAN, and my FRIEND:
While I from Fancy's fairy realms depart,
To ſearch the nobler regions of the heart,
Deign, heavenly Guide, my numbers to inſpire,
And wake to bolder ſtrains the breathing lyre.
The flow'ry landſcape, and the blooming fair,
Bright as they are, no more demand my care,

Direct my eyes from NATURE's pleaſing roll,
To read the MORAL BEAUTY of the ſoul,
To trace her form by matter unconfin'd,
Thro' each divine perfection of the mind,
And there behold her ſovereign hand diſpenſe,
The powers of bliſs to each attending ſenſe.

Say, if we roam where all the Graces lead,
Thro' the cool thicket, or th' enamel'd mead?
Tho' NATURE in her vernal pride appear,
Or laughing Summer deck the purple year,
What ſcenes of pleaſure can the boſom ſhare
Deform'd by paſſion, or diſturb'd by care?
Or what delightful hopes does love impart,
When jaundic'd jealouſy infects the heart?

'Tis in the mind that BEAUTY ſtands confeſs'd,
In all the nobleſt pride of glory dreſs'd,
Where virtue's rules the conſcious boſom arm,
There to our eyes ſhe ſpreads her brighteſt charm:
There all her rays, with force collected, ſhine,
Proclaim her worth, and ſpeak her race divine.

Ye

Ye ſages, who creation's depth explore,
And hang inceſſant o'er the pleaſing lore,
Who view the earth, in ſtated periods, run
Her courſe myſterious round the central ſun,
Who view five diff'rent orbs direct their flight
Round the ſame chearing fount of heat and light;
Who ruſhing forward, urg'd by force divine,
See diſtant ſuns on diſtant ſyſtems ſhine,
Till all the wiſdom reas'ning man can boaſt,
Amidſt the boundleſs fields of ſpace is loſt.
Vaſt as it is! does this ſtupendous whole
With half that wonder ſtrike th' aſtoniſh'd ſoul?
With half that veneration fill the mind?
As thoſe brave chiefs, the patrons of mankind,
Who mov'd by pity for the public weal,
Deſpis'd the tyrant's axe, the bigot's wheel,
Repell'd the cruel force of factious hate,
Or bravely fell, to ſave a ſinking ſtate?

Ye warrior kings! Ambition's fav'rite train,
Who hunt falſe glory thro' th' embattled plain;

Tho' varniſh'd ſpeciouſly your martial rage
Beams forth too brightly from th' hiſtorian's page,
Tho' lays divine record each impious name,
And worlds misjudging, call th' oppreſſion, fame;
The honeſt man, from power at diſtance plac'd,
By freedom guarded, and by virtue grac'd,
More true rewards from reaſon's hand ſhall find,
Than ye, the ſtorms and earthquakes of mankind.
Tho' half the globe, by error drawn aſide,
Scorn modeſt merit, while they kneel to pride;
Fair reaſon dares aſſert the fair pretence
To endleſs fame, of peaceful innocence,
Will ſnatch the wreath from proud ambition's ſword,
And honor SHENSTONE more than PRUSSIA'S LORD.
So when ſome torrent, ſwell'd by haſty rains,
Rolls from the hills, and hides the neighb'ring plains,
The meads around one liquid mirror lie,
A glorious object to the ſtranger's eye,
But worthier praiſes to the ſtream belong,
Which winds its waves the humbler vales among,

Improves

Improves the fields that grace its ſedgy ſides,
And pours fair plenty where its current glides.

O! would the royal race but learn to know
From what bleſt ſource their future praiſe muſt flow,
Enroll'd with TITUS in the liſts of fame
Succeeding times ſhould ſanctify each name:
The ſmiles of freedom o'er a realm to ſpread,
To bid fair ſcience lift her lovely head,
To ſtrike dread terror thro' the guilty breaſt,
To raiſe the humble, and relieve th' oppreſs'd,
With lenient hand to ſtop the heart-felt ſigh,
And wipe the tear from pale affliction's eye,
Theſe! theſe are charms! to which compar'd the globe,
The crown, the ſcepter, and the purple robe,
The arm'd array, the courtier's idle ſtate,
And all the low ambition of the great,
Meet with our childhood's toys an equal lot,
A moment's tranſport, and the next forgot.
Virtue alone, on active wings, ſhall riſe
From earth's mean pomp, and ſeek her native ſkies:

She

She of ſuperior luſtre nobly proud,
Contemns the ſuffrage of the fickle croud,
Mocks envy's darts, and ſcandal's pois'nous breath,
Great, tho' defam'd, and conqu'ror, ev'n in death.

For freedom arm'd, on CHALGRAVE's fatal plain,
Lo! glorious HAMPDEN number'd with the ſlain:
O! while with mournful ſighs you view his tomb,
Own him more bleſt in that untimely doom,
Than impious CROMWELL; tho' his ſtronger fate
Grac'd him with all the gorgeous pomp of ſtate,
Who, baſe deſerter of his country's cauſe,
Deſpis'd her ſenates, and revers'd her laws;
Chang'd regal power for arbitrary ſway,
Fought to enſlave, protected to betray,
And clos'd the horrid ſcene of ſocial ſtrife
With the ſad off'ring of his ſov'reign's life.

Thrice happy train! whom freedom leads afar,
To hurl on foreign foes the bolts of war:

Rancour

Rancour to you ſhall ne'er impute the guilt
Of royal blood, in civil diſcord ſpilt,
But the victorious band ſhall juſtly claim
The wreath of glory, and immortal fame;
While on the youthful warrior's fatal bier
His ſorrowing country pours the penſive tear:
Secure thoſe chiefs of honor's laſting meed,
Who fight like GRANBY, or like WOLFE who bleed.

Are there ſo mean, who boaſt of worth that ſprings
From venal ſtateſmen, and deluded kings?
Who without bluſhing own, their hands have ſold
Their fame, their truth, their liberty for gold?
Who break each tye of public, private life,
For ſounding titles, or a portion'd wife,
Proud on their breaſts a glitt'ring mark to bear,
Which honor hates, and virtue ſcorns to wear:
Tho' the miſdeeming vulgar's dazzled ſight
Awhile may bleſs theſe meteors ſpurious light,
Short is their joy! — let fortune hide her head,
Such pride is tarniſh'd, and ſuch glory fled:

While

While that unfading worth, which builds alone
On VIRTUE's ſolid baſe, a laſting throne,
And, by no random cenſures kept in awe,
Is clear'd by CONSCIENCE, and by VIRTUE's law;
On fortune's ſmiles can look with coolneſs down,
Can bear, without a pang, her keeneſt frown:
The threats of want, of death, unmov'd can hear,
And fearing GOD, diſclaim all other fear,
Shine forth alike, oppreſs'd, or grac'd by power,
In courts, in camps, in exile, or the tower.

Thus far, O BEAUTY! has my daring tongue,
In humble lays, thy various merits ſung:
Still as the theme, impetuous I purſue,
The fleeting goal flies farther from my view;
Ev'n in the breaſt by virtue's dictates arm'd,
Thy light is ſickly, and thy ſhape deform'd;
The ſtormy paſſions all their rage employ
To cloud that luſtre which they can't deſtroy.
Then WISDOM, come! unfold thy myſtic page,
Rich with the ſpoils of ev'ry clime, and age,

Thy

Thy aweful volume let my eyes explore,
Till vanquiſh'd NATURE yield up all her ſtore:
And thou, MORALITY, whoſe ſacred art
By virtuous precepts forms the human heart,
Teach me whate'er experience yet has found,
In all its curious ſearch, and ample round;
And ſhew my wav'ring mind a certain courſe
To trace bright BEAUTY to her perfect ſource.
In vain you try to ſolve the thorny maze,
And guide my feet thro' error's devious ways,
Loſt and bewilder'd midſt her paths I rove,
Uncertain how to turn, or where to move.
But from the regions of celeſtial day,
Behold! a form etherial wings her way!
Meek-eye'd RELIGION, hail! — for well I know
Thy mild demeanor, and thy placid brow.
'Tis thine alone the wand'ring thought to bring
To fair perfection's bright, unſully'd ſpring:
'Tis thine, with firm, tho' modeſt look, to gaze
Upon th' empyreal heav'n, and ſapphire blaze.

But hold, my MUSE! nor rashly thus aspire,
With verse so mean, to join th' ANGELIC choir,
Who glorify in ceaseless strains above,
The FIRST GREAT CAUSE of harmony and love:
The awful praises of whose HALLOW'D NAME
No heart can image, and no tongue proclaim,
Enough for thee his glorious works to trace
In earth, and skies, and man's imperial race;
To view in ev'ry clime, and ev'ry hour,
Th' OMNIPOTENT, and OMNIPRESENT Power,
To see all NATURE's charms derive their force
From this ETERNAL, UNIVERSAL SOURCE,
And in mysterious silence wrap'd, to own
That BEAUTY's perfect grace is found in HIM alone.

THE END.